



WHAT IS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching ”-**Article 18(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**

INDICATORS OF A LACK OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The International Religious Freedom Act defines five violations of religious freedom:

Arbitrary prohibitions on, restrictions of, or punishment for:

- (i) assembling for peaceful religious activities such as worship, preaching, and prayer, including arbitrary registration requirements; (ii) speaking freely about one's religious beliefs; (iii) changing one's religious beliefs and affiliation; (iv) possession and distribution of religious literature, including Bibles and other sacred texts; (v) raising one's children in the religious teachings and practices of one's choice.

When reviewing a country's state of religious freedom, we look for laws or policies that:

- 1) restrict the right to hold a religious belief;
- 2) limit the right to change religious belief;
- 3) restrict the freedom to have an allegiance to a religious leader;
- 4) disparage individuals or groups on the basis of their religion;
- 5) discriminate against religious persons in education, the military, employment opportunities or in health services;
- 6) require the designation of religion on passports or national identity documents, either overtly or in code;
- 7) restrict religious assembly;
- 8) restrict religious expression;

COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

According to the IRF Act (Section 402), a country is designated by the Department of State as a **Country of Particular Concern (CPC)** if its government is determined to have engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The IRF Act defines particularly severe violations of religious freedom as **systematic, ongoing, egregious violations**.

The Act provides a list of examples of such activities:

- torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment;
- extended detention without charges;
- causing the disappearance of persons by abduction or clandestine detention; and
- other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or security;

USEFUL LINKS:

The Office of International Religious Freedom

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/index.htm>

The official United States Government website for human rights related information

www.humanrights.gov

The International Religious Freedom Report

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/>

For updates on the work of the Ambassador at Large and to learn more about the Office of International Religious Freedom, follow @IRFAmbassador and join <http://www.facebook.com/RFAmbassador> on Facebook.

“People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul.”

– President Barack Obama, 2009
